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UNCLAS PRAGUE 001496

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: CZECH RESPONSE TO U.S. PROPOSAL FOR WTO
AGRICULTURE NEGOTIATIONS

REF: SECSTATE 190730

11. (U) SUMMARY: The Ministry of Industry and Trade received our demarche with genuine welcome and said that although they would have to consult with the Ministry of Agriculture, it would be in the interest of the Czech Republic to urge the EU to seize this timely opportunity to get beyond the agriculture debate in the WTO. Ministry of Trade clearly believes the Czech Republic should be in favor of giving the European Commission greater flexibility in its negotiating mandate. While the Ministry of Agriculture was not as forthcoming about what position the GOCR would take in Luxembourg, they asked numerous questions about the U.S. proposal, indicating at least some level of interest. Deputy Minister of Industry and Trade Martin Tlapa is representing the Czech Republic at the October 18 GAERC meeting in Luxembourg. END SUMMARY

12. (SBU) Econoffs met separately with Ministry of Industry and Trade (Department of the EU Multilateral Trade Policy and Common Trade Policy Director Ladislava Votavova) and the Ministry of Agriculture (Department of EU Trade Agreements Department Marta Tepla). The Ministry of Industry and Trade received the refel demarche with genuine interest and welcome. Votavova explained that the Czech Republic did not have much at stake in the agriculture debate given its small agriculture sector, but that the GOCR was interested in a more "balanced approach" to the WTO debate, listing the GOCR's priorities as Non-Agriculture Market Access (NAMA), Services, Geographical Indicators, and Agriculture from most to least important.

13. (SBU) Per usual practice, the Ministry of Agriculture's Tepla deferred to the EU and said the Czech Republic would have "no input" into the process of formulating the EU position on this issue. She added, however, that the Czech Republic did not sign the French petition urging EU trade commissioner Mandelson to hold off on making any concessions until he consults with national governments. Tepla underscored that agricultural barriers in the Czech Republic were lower before joining the EU and they would not be threatened by a more open agricultural policy.

14. (SBU) COMMENT: While the Agriculture Ministry continues to resist taking any firm position within the EU, the Ministry of Industry and Trade clearly sees this as a timely opportunity to get beyond the agriculture debate in the WTO. With little at stake in terms of agriculture, we do not expect the Czech Republic to be overly active in this area, but also will not hinder granting the Commission greater negotiating flexibility.
CABANISS